



ARTICLE

The Value of Work-Related Uncertainty: Changes from Demands on Certainty to Finding Ways of Living in Uncertainty

Michal Müller

Palacký University Olomouc, the Czech Republic

ABSTRACT

Given the negative consequences that excessive confrontation with uncertainty can have, its positive dimension is often forgotten. The aim of this article is to show that the uncertainty associated with work, working conditions and the context in which working relationships are formed can be considered as a positive value. This will be shown through four themes. The first theme concerns the economic system. It is important to show that a certain degree of insecurity is necessary not only for individual freedom in society, but also for society as a whole, as there is a relationship between economic and political freedom. The second theme concerns entrepreneurship. In this respect, the article reminds us that uncertainty is a prerequisite for entrepreneurial activity. The third area deals with employment. Uncertainty and the life experience associated with it is an opportunity for personal development and the search for innovative ways of coping and solving problems, moreover, it is related to a sense of freedom. The fourth theme deals with the positive role of uncertainty in the context of the current crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this positive value will only emerge if human health is protected.

KEYWORDS

freedom, risk and uncertainty, sociology of work, value of uncertainty, work uncertainty

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This article was supported by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic within the project IGA_FF_2020_012 “Qualitative research of critical moments of managerial practice” of Palacký University Olomouc.

Introduction

This article deals with the two important sociological concepts, which are also discussed in philosophy: uncertainty and work. Work is a significant sociological phenomenon that has had a large impact on the formation of social reality throughout history. The concept of uncertainty is not yet properly analysed, because much more attention is given to risk, which is usually connected to quantifiable indicators (Knight, 1921). Risk and uncertainty are always situated in a social context, and sociology shows how the definition of these phenomena “shape social relations and distribution powers to groups, at the same time as other groups are excluded from decision making” (Lidskog & Sundqvist, 2012, p. 1019).

This article focuses on how attitudes to uncertainty transform working relationships, especially in the context of freedom. It turns out that society is transitioning from excessive adherence to certainty, caused by negative experience during the early form of capitalism, to finding ways to live in uncertainty. Work uncertainty and other work-related uncertainties have a positive dimension and thus represent significant value. This article aims to show three levels where uncertainty can be considered a value in relation to work: the level of the economic system, which affects freedom to choose an occupation; entrepreneurship, where uncertainty is a prerequisite for business and economy in general; and finally, employment, where uncertainty is necessary for a sense of freedom and for the possibility of development.

The first part of the article will connect uncertainty with a related phenomenon—risk. The following sections will discuss the positive role of uncertainty at the level of the state, entrepreneurship and employment. Then, it will be shown how these themes are now gaining more urgency in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic, which offers a space for reflection on uncertainty and its consequences, whether negative or positive.

Risk and Uncertainty in our Society

The real world around us is a place where we can seldom meet with certainty. Uncertainty is a much more complicated phenomenon; it is sometimes understood as a general term that includes several phenomena related to the uncertain nature of the world. In the scientific disciplines that deal with decision-making, the term “risk” is used to describe those forms of uncertainty which are amenable to quantification of the probability that certain events will occur in the future. This basic distinction between risk and uncertainty is found in economic disciplines (Knight, 1921).

Risk, sometimes referred to as expected uncertainty, is examined in different disciplines and is viewed through various epistemological approaches. As Rolf Lidskog and Göran Sundqvist (2012, pp. 1020–1021) argue, the question arises as to whether risk has physical characteristics that exist independently of the social and cultural context, or whether risk is shaped and constructed by that context. Experts in their risk analysis aim at assessing actual threats by evidence-based scientific investigation. As a result, their risk analysis can be described from the

realist perspective. On the other hand, the general public in their risk assessment are often influenced by the social context and communication processes that can amplify risk perceptions or reduce them. Therefore, the latter can be understood from the social constructivist perspective.

As Jens O. Zinn (2008, p. 173) shows, risk is also understood in theories as a way of dealing with uncertainty. In this context, it is a question of how these uncertainties are rationally managed, and individual theories differ not only in their approach to this rationality, but also in the way risk is measured.

In some social sciences, the division between risk and uncertainty is not strictly conceptualized. At the level of ordinary language, the terms “risk” and “uncertainty” may be used in similar or identical contexts. We often find that we talk about risk in terms of a potential threat without determining any degree of probability. Similarly, some concepts of risk perception, such as a culturally oriented approach, have little to do with probability calculation (Lupton, 2013, pp. 9, 10).

Sjöberg et al. (2004, p. 7) distinguish risk *per se* and the engineered risk. The latter can be measured but cannot be overused in risk management. Paul D. Windschitl and Gary L. Wells (1996, p. 343) emphasize the fact that uncertainty is a psychological construct and exists only in the human mind, because if human knowledge were complete, nothing like uncertainty would exist. According to Sjöberg et al. (2004, p. 7), risk is closely linked to uncertainty, and it is psychological uncertainty that is important for understanding human responses to situations whose consequences are unknown.

In addition, it should be borne in mind that epistemic uncertainty also comes into play when making decisions, which means that the decision-maker does not have to be confident about the estimated probabilities (Müller, 2016). Sven Ove Hansson (1999, p. 539) realizes that while the distinction between risk and epistemic uncertainty is useful, it is not very clear how to distinguish the two categories. Hansson illustrates this situation with the example of a meteorological forecast. If there is 50% probability of rain tomorrow and we believe this prediction, it will be a matter of risk. On the contrary, if the probability quantified for us by meteorologists is not credible enough, it will be a question of uncertainty. People realize that experts who make predictions can very easily be wrong. We can very rarely approach the probability available to us with certainty. Hansson concludes that risk basically occurs only in textbook examples, such as a coin toss or dice (Hansson, 1999, p. 539).

Uncertainty related to work in this article applies to all the situations where it is not possible to estimate the future development of the labour market due to the complexity of the environment, as well as situations where labour market actors feel uncertain, despite the probability of remaining in the job position. Ulrich Beck also describes this world of uncertainty in his “risk society”. He points out that risk is a hybrid entity, as it is both a real danger and something completely hypothetical, based on a social construction related to an uncertain future (Beck, 1986/1992; Zinn, 2008, p. 179). Today's world, shaped by modernization and technological development, there is increased uncertainty in the labour market. Jobs that are

widely spread today will not exist in the future, and on the contrary, completely new jobs will appear. It is natural for people to worry about the future, nevertheless, in the following sections I will argue that uncertainty is not entirely negative but also has a positive value.

The Case of an Economic System

Various texts in the fields of political philosophy, sociology and economics use terms such as “freedom”, “economic certainty”, “uncertainty” and “risk”. These terms are used in different contexts and with different meanings. In this section, I will argue that uncertainty and risk, if we consider the possibility of some quantification, can to some extent be understood as a price to be paid for democracy, related to the uncertain nature of the capitalist society. In this light, the discussion between the advocates of a centrally planned economy and advocates of capitalism is worthy of interest. To show the difference between these terms, we can use the text by Friedrich Engels (1880/1908) *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* and the text by Friedrich August von Hayek (1944/2001) *The Road to Serfdom*, where he criticizes socialist planning.

Engels’ argumentation in favour of a centrally planned economy includes an attack on capitalism, in particular the uncertainty associated with life in a capitalist society. The struggle between individual capitalists is, according to Engels (1880/1908, p. 110), “the Darwinian struggle of the individual for existence transferred from Nature to society with intensified violence,” and despite the long human history, “the conditions of existence natural to the animal appear as the final term of human development”. The society is torn by the constant repetition of business cycles. According to Engels, the anarchy of production is the cause of this “vicious circle”, or better, of the “spiral” that must come to an end. The business, credit, and speculation steeplechase lead to a collapse and, as a result, one must be liberated from the recurrent economic bankruptcies (Engels, 1880/1908, p. 110). Manufacturers merge, regulate production, determine the amount of production and the selling price. This, according to Engels, leads to the situation where the whole industry “is turned into one gigantic joint-stock company” and “internal competition gives place to the internal monopoly of this one company” (Engels, 1880/1908, p. 120). Within monopolies, exploitation is so obvious that it must result in their collapse. The state must therefore take over production control.

The industrial reserve army is a regulator that keeps wages as low as is suitable to capital needs. Only the revolution to which history inevitably tends can restore the proletariat to human dignity:

With the seizing of the means of production by society, production of commodities is done away with, and, simultaneously, the mastery of the product over the producer. Anarchy in social production is replaced by systematic, definite organization. That struggle for individual existence disappears. Then for the first time, man, in a certain sense, is finally marked off from the rest of the animal

kingdom, and emerges from mere animal conditions of existence into really human ones. (Engels, 1880/1908, pp. 133–134)

Engels is convinced that people will become masters of nature because and they are able to consciously manage the conditions surrounding them. In this socialist world there will be no place for uncertainty. According to Engels (1878/1987), freedom consists in the control over ourselves and over external nature, a control founded on knowledge of natural necessity. People will be masters of the forces that have so far dominated them, making a leap from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom. The proletariat through the revolution will liberate the world (Engels, 1880/1908, pp. 135–136). For Engels, the uncertainty associated with capitalism is thus an obstacle to freedom, which he sees as liberation from uncertainty. This planned organization also involves work. Karl Marx argues in following way:

We also saw that capital, in the social production process appropriate to it—and the capitalist is simply personified capital, functioning in the production process simply as the bearer of capital—pumps out a certain specific quantum of surplus labour from the direct producers or workers, surplus labour that it receives without an equivalent and which by its very nature always remains forced labour, however much it might appear as the result of free contractual agreement. (Marx, 1894/1993, pp. 957–958)

Therefore, according to Marx, society needs to achieve freedom that “can consist only in this, that socialized man, the associated producers, govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control instead of being dominated by it as a blind power” (Marx, 1894/1993, p. 959).

It is evident that this concept of freedom takes on a somewhat different character than that of freedom, as understood in a democratic society. Hayek (1944/2001, p. 46), as a supporter of liberalism, rejects central planning and draws attention to the danger of a socialist program that seeks to remove uncertainty from society. He points out that planning advocates regard planning as a necessity, as circumstances caused by free competition are beyond our control. However, their claims are not supported by enough arguments but only by reference to past authorities. The monopolies, which are often called a necessary product of the development of capitalism, were in fact the result of a government policy, “a conscious organization of industry” and “scientific planning”. According to Hayek (1944/2001, p. 48), this has been the case in Germany since 1878. Protectionist policies in the USA have had similar consequences.

According to Hayek, effective control or planning of a system might not be difficult if the conditions were so simple that a single person or a commission doing the planning could actually take into account all the relevant facts. However, the real situation is much more complicated—information is necessary for decision-making, and a pricing system based on well-functioning competition is a suitable mechanism, which provides information on all minor changes (Hayek, 1944/2001, p. 57).

To direct all our activities according to a single plan presupposes that every one of our needs is given its rank in an order of values which must be complete enough to make it possible to decide between all the different courses between which the planner has to choose. It presupposes, in short, the existence of a complete ethical code in which all the different human values are allotted their due place. (Hayek, 1944/2001, p. 60)

However, the problem arises that we have no such universal value scale and that it is “impossible for any mind to comprehend the infinite variety of different needs of different people which compete for the available resources and to attach a definite weight to each” (Hayek, 1944/2001, p. 62). For Hayek, individualism is based on the fact that more than one section of the needs of society as a whole cannot be included under our value scale.

The goals of public well-being should not be achieved at the expense of freedom. Hayek (1944/2001, p. 69) points out that it is not necessary to completely abandon the idea of economic certainty, but it should be borne in mind that if the entitlement to social certainty is understood in an overly absolute sense, this becomes a great danger to freedom. Limited certainty for all, which does not jeopardize general freedom or prepares for accidental life risks, is acceptable. However, it must be ensured that these measures do not destroy competition. A state that provides more security does not, according to Hayek, suppress individual freedom. All economic activities are related to planning, but it is not possible to accept the situation where planning is used to replace the market.

Central planning takes a dramatic form in the context of work. Rewards commensurate with the objective outcomes of human endeavour are incompatible with freedom of choice:

In any system which for the distribution of men between the different trades and occupations relies on their own choice it is necessary that the remuneration in these trades should correspond to their usefulness to the other members of society, even if this should stand in no relation to subjective merit. (Hayek, 1944/2001, p. 126)

If we want to guarantee an unchanging income to everyone, it is necessary to abolish the freedom to choose an occupation, which is inadmissible, since the reward would have nothing to do with the benefits. People must be motivated to work—they perform better if they are guided by their own interests. The planned economy is moving towards a situation where discipline will be ensured by corporal punishment—the highest threat is no longer the bailiff but the executioner (Hayek, 1944/2001, p. 130). The failure of an individual becomes a crime against society, certainty is redeemed by freedom.

Every decision-making is associated with risk and if we want to get rid of risk, we must also take away the possibility of making a decision. Hayek (1944/2001, p. 137) admits, however, that a certain amount of certainty is necessary to preserve freedom,

since most people are only willing to bear to some extent the risks that freedom necessarily entails.

At first glance, it might seem that this comparison of dramatically different concepts is not up to date in the current debate, as we are now living in the world of mixed-type economies where the shortcomings of the market mechanism are corrected by the public sector. The relationship between freedom, uncertainty and risk is therefore not usually so dramatic. However, there are still views that words such as “communist” and “democratic” are not mutually exclusive and are compatible, although this has been debated in many studies (see: Friedman, 1962/2002). The discussion of the relationship between risk, uncertainty and the fundamental values of a free society is still significant. Given the current societal challenges, we must constantly seek acceptable levels of risk and uncertainty.

The Case of Entrepreneurship

In the capitalist society, uncertainty with its dynamic changes in the real world leads entrepreneurs to seek profit and try to avoid losses. Without this important role played by entrepreneurs it would not be possible to talk about a functioning market, and economy where economic calculation is possible. According to von Mises, a real economy without calculation is not possible. The world of certainty described in the previous section is deprived of any motive for doing business (see: Rothbard, 1991; von Mises, 1949/1998, pp. 694–705). Ludwig von Mises is even more radical in his arguments than Hayek and shows that a centrally planned economy is not only flawed but in principle impossible (von Mises, 1920/1990).

Murray N. Rothbard (1991) notes that the collapse of socialism and the centrally planned economy is currently perceived in the context of a catastrophic economic failure, but decades ago, in the midst of debates about the nature of a socialist economy, the prevailing view was that the major problems of socialism are not economic. A frequently discussed topic was, for example, socialist efforts to transform human nature (see: Camus, 1951/1956). But in 1920, economist and philosopher Ludwig von Mises came up with an original critique of a centrally planned economy based on economic calculations. In his article *Die Wirtschaftsrechnung im sozialistischen Gemeinwesen* [Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth] (von Mises, 1920/1990) he demonstrates that freedom, property and sound money are the necessary and sufficient conditions for the existence and evolution of human society (see: Salerno, 1990). In his reasoning von Mises is so prescient that he responds to the objections raised later (see: Lange, 1938 p. 70).

As Joseph T. Salerno observes (2014; see also Salerno, 1990, p. 44), von Mises points out that even if planners are not burdened with the knowledge problems Hayek emphasizes, they will still not be able to determine how to allocate factors of production or calculate optima. Allocation decisions are overwhelmingly complex as planners will be confronted with changed conditions at all times. The quantity and quality of productive services is subject to constant change as these services originate in a stock of gradually transformed physical assets and work capabilities.

In the context of work, planners will never be able to plan working relationships and determine who, when, where and how to produce. And it is precisely the uncertainty that leads entrepreneurs to modify individual relationships and seek new, better solutions to current situations, and at the same time, they are motivated by profit.

The pricing system is not the most important thing, as Hayek points out, but the result of previously achieved prices that are based on valuations—mental operations. These prices are an instrument of economic analysis, which is not a means of acquiring knowledge, but a prerequisite for rational action. The existence of an economy, therefore, requires entrepreneurs who carry out the calculations, and these calculations cannot be replaced by any organized plan, or by the use of computation technologies. The real world is dynamic, filled with change and uncertainty. Uncertainty leads entrepreneurs to seek profit. The role of the entrepreneur who deals uncertainty is essential for capitalist economy.

Von Mises (1949/1998, p. 700) points out that the entrepreneur does not know whether his business will be successful, and thus finds himself uncertain. This method can be described as a trial-and-error method. Socialists believe that this method can be imitated, but in a socialist economy, profit and loss calculation is not possible. Von Mises (1949/1998, pp. 701–702) also points to the absurd efforts of neo-socialists (such as Lange, 1938), who first destroy all the characteristics of the market and then try to artificially organize society as if “the market”, competition and so on existed. These socialists want, says von Mises, people to play at the market without realizing how this game is different from the reality. Von Mises points out (1949/1998, p. 704) that the great error of socialists is that they view economic problems from the point of view of subordinate officials who cannot see beyond their specific entrusted tasks. Thus, in the eyes of the socialists, the allocation of capital and the structure of industrial production is something unchangeable and the need to change this structure is overlooked. According to the socialists, economic history is in its final stage. But managerial activities, as von Mises shows, are only a small part of the market processes. Von Mises argues that one cannot play speculation and investment: “The speculators and investors expose their own wealth, their own destiny. This fact makes them responsible to the consumers, the ultimate bosses of the capitalist economy” (von Mises, 1949/1998, p. 705).

Max Weber (1921/1978) develops Menger’s ideas in the field of economic sociology, and, like von Mises, points out the problem of calculation in non-monetary economies. As Stephen D. Parsons shows, “Weber argues that entrepreneurs make production decisions under conditions of uncertainty, where the goals of action are subject of choice and where the consumer wants to be formed through entrepreneurial action” (Parsons, 2020, p. 149). Moreover, according to Weber, entrepreneurial activity related to rational choice is associated not only with the sense of freedom, but also with the responsibility for individual choices (Parsons, 2020, p. 160; Weber, 1919/2004, p. 92). Here we return to the ethical problems that were mentioned in the context of a centrally planned economy. Freedom is possible only in the context of uncertainty, which is a precondition for the freedom to choose an occupation, but also for one’s responsibility for their actions.

The Case of Employment

Vicki Smith (2016) in her review of the findings related to sociology of employment risk and uncertainty deals with the question of what social structural conditions may lead someone to consider employment risk and uncertainty perceived as an opportunity. This question brings us again to the positive value of uncertainty, and to another level that we examine in this article—the level of employment. Smith mentions that “for sociologists of work, a core puzzle has been why some individuals and groups are positive about employment risk and turbulence, even seeming to favour it to the point of endorsing popular ‘free agent’ and ‘entrepreneurial’ ideologies” (Smith, 2016, p. 70). According to Smith, it is fascinating that the research on employment uncertainty has led to the discovery that some groups of people prefer constant change and uncertainty about employment and are able to accept uncertainty about their future job opportunities. This raises the following questions: “Are they irrational, incapable of understanding how they are being used by employers? Do they fail to recognize that corporations will callously dump free agents at a moment’s notice?” (Smith, 2016, p. 370). Before turning to our own psychological analysis of the positive value of job-related uncertainty, we first summarize the studies where Smith (2016) finds the answer.

Smith explains “that people’s willingness to embrace risk and unpredictability—to view uncertainty and constraint as opportunity—is conditioned by institutional context and material practices”. To illustrate this point, she uses as an example the observations of Wall Street Banking Firms by Ho (2009), media workers in Manhattan’s Silicon Alley by Neff (2012) and cases of project-based work. With time, employees get used to the corporate layoff strategy and employment culture that uses the rhetoric stating that layoffs and continual change are industry-specific and remain on the constant lookout for new job opportunities. In addition, short-term employment—and risk-taking—can be offset by financial remuneration (Ho, 2009, p. 224; Smith, 2016, p. 371). The analysis by Gina Neff (2012) is also worthy of interest in relation to work uncertainty. Research has shown that media workers regard their job decisions as a series of investments that will stimulate their firms’ success. These workers were willing to take risks and work for unknown and start-up companies. Moreover, they were willing to accept poorly paid work or unpaid internships. As Smith writes:

Experiencing turbulence and unpredictability from such an advantaged location makes it possible to emphasize positive discourses about the advantages of risk and opportunity, praising and seemingly embracing it: to rationalize away fears and concerns about periods of unemployment; to view oneself as being in control of one’s destiny; and to maintain individualistic perspectives on personal successes. (Smith, 2016, p. 371)

Neff (2012, p. 37) points out that these workers were able to “convert uncertainty into opportunities for wealth and advancement”. A similar situation is also observed

for workers working on projects in the creative industry, where workers are exposed to fierce competition in uncertain conditions. Smith (2016) notes that:

These workers eschew attachment to one firm or one employer, undermining conventional sociological arguments that job stability and commitment alone can explain why workers work hard and put in quality effort. Their experiences also undermine conventional expectations that workers prefer long-term jobs and continuity. (Smith, 2016, p. 372)

A guidance to understanding preferences can be found in the research by Debra Osnowitz (2010), who conducted interviews with contract professionals. These professionals experienced negative aspects of the work conditions as permanent workers such as management abuse, blocked mobility that led to feelings of uncertainty, while contracting gave them an illusion of certainty.

There is another explanation for why job uncertainty may be perceived as an opportunity that is related to Osnowitz's observations. This explanation could be based on the ability of employees to perceive differences between social contexts and their consequences. However, in these considerations we move from the sociological to the psychological level of analysis, because in addition to social determinants, psychological determinants related to employees' specific cognitive abilities and personality must also be taken into account. We need to talk not only about the social conditions that can transform uncertainty into an opportunity, but also about the personalities of people who tend to seek such conditions. One could say that certain professions are more acceptable to certain personality types of people, e.g., those who are better at working with risk and uncertainty. In the previous section we mentioned entrepreneurs and it was pointed out that in a socio-economic perspective, uncertainty is considered as a prerequisite for a given type of activity. Some people may seek out uncertainty directly because the sense of certainty also has its negative side, such as routine and repetitive work leading to overall stagnation.

Managerial work is associated with all sorts of uncertainties and turbulent changes in a globalized society. All management textbooks begin with the characteristics of managers' personalities. Being a manager means being confronted with uncertainty. One level of uncertainty relates to success in individual activities that fall under the managerial competence. The second level, which is closely related to the first, concerns the possibility of losing job in the event of misconduct, which implies the risk of unemployment. Research shows that successful managers confronted with uncertainty and with states when habitual ways of doing things cannot be taken for granted reconsider—deconstruct—uncertainty to see new opportunities (Müller & Jedličková, 2020; Rolfe et al., 2016; Rolfe et al., 2017).

Critical situations associated with the so-called existential disruptions—situations where habitual ways of doing things are threatened (Müller, 2019; Rolfe et al., 2016)—and the uncertainty associated with them provide an important context for the process of becoming a manager. Facing uncertainty and responsibility both for the future

progress of the company, but also for one's own uncertainty about the manager's job leads to self-awareness of the manager's own identity (Müller, 2020). Even managers who, in the context of a critical situation in a company, decide to change jobs and face uncertainty, describe this moment as liberating and reinterpret the crisis in positive terms (Müller, Jedličková, & Halová, in press). Existential approaches to management show that an important ability of a manager is to adapt to the constant alternation of success and failure, reminiscent of the Sisyphean struggle described by Camus (Müller, 2021).

Greater willingness to face work uncertainty can also be seen in the younger generations, as evidenced by the data from sociological and demographic research: generations Y and Z are more willing to change jobs and have different work preferences than older generations (see: McCrindle, 2014). This situation illustrates the interaction of social conditions and the psychological (or biological, if we go to a deeper level of analysis) development of individuals who choose a certain type of employment—especially in the creative industry, social media, technology start-ups, and so on. It is possible that going through the process of education under uncertain conditions associated with constant change develops one's ability to reinterpret uncertainty as an opportunity.

Understanding uncertainty and the ability to manage its manifestations is an important prerequisite for the self-development of managers and knowledge workers (Müller & Kubátová, 2021). Another level may be the perception of freedom, which in the deterministic world depends on uncertainty, because without uncertainty, there would be no hope, ethics or freedom of choice, because all this is possible only because we do not know what the future will bring us (Hastie & Dawes, 2010, p. 333).

Work-Related Uncertainty in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The current period associated with the COVID-19 pandemic is the greatest reminder of uncertainty in modern history. It shows both the negative and positive dimensions of this phenomenon. The pandemic crisis highlights the relevance of the themes presented above regarding the value of uncertainty at all levels.

On the level of the state, the coronavirus pandemic required unprecedented state restrictions to protect public health. Anti-epidemic measures have had a significant impact on human freedoms and rights. Many countries could only handle the uncertainty of the pandemic through restrictions on freedom. In the context of the many victims and the uncertainty of further mutations of the virus, it is clear that these unprecedented measures were justified. However, governments of all countries faced difficult choices, as restrictions brought with them many other economic and social problems, as does any effort to eliminate uncertainty. The search for the optimal level of uncertainty is a task that humanity has faced since its inception, and the current era shows just how important this task is. As Joyce J. Fitzpatrick mentions pointing to the results of neurocognitive studies, we only learn from uncertainty: "if that is truly the case with humans then the learning occurring today with the uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic positions

us for considerable intense and dramatic learning” (Fitzpatrick, 2020). It is precisely these difficult and uncertain pandemic conditions that can create the right backdrop for growth linked to learning and for realising our potential.

The uncertainty of the pandemic has dramatically affected entrepreneurs, especially those whose activities have been constrained by government measures. But even in this area, uncertainty opens space for learning and for harnessing creativity. Entrepreneurs confronted with uncertainty must look for new opportunities. Recent research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on social enterprises, which represent a very vulnerable part of the market, particularly because they employ people disadvantaged in the labour market, shows that, despite numerous obstacles, many entrepreneurs have been able to seize the opportunities. In particular, these were the entrepreneurs operating in multiple business areas who were able to implement operational as well as strategic changes such as finding new customers, introducing new products or focusing on the production of respiratory masks (Kročil et al., 2021). However, it is clear that the level of uncertainty associated with the pandemic is too excessive and that the full impact of the current crisis will not be assessed until much later.

The COVID-19 pandemic is undoubtedly having an impact on employment, and for many people the uncertainty may be very oppressive. However, even the current pandemic-related crisis can bring people the feeling of fulfilment from work and the discovery of meaningfulness (Müller, 2020). Even in the deepest crisis caused by the pandemic, managers can pause to reflect on the situation. The manager of a company that was deeply affected by the pandemic describes this situation in terms of her own interest in the phenomenological literature as an opportunity to discover self-awareness (Kročil et al., in press). It is the experience of existential uncertainty that often reminds us of the possibility of non-being that provides a means to achieve authentic experience (Müller & Vaseková, in press). Another significant change that the pandemic has brought about through the dynamic development of IT is the possibility to work from anywhere in the world. This is especially true for talent who can be hired to work on the other side of the world, increasing the mobility of talented workers who can take advantage of more opportunities (Haak-Saheem, 2020). Trends related to virtual work will continue, and the labour market will have to deal with this fact both in terms of supply and demand for labour (Halová & Müller, 2021).

Discussion and Conclusion

The article pointed out that the uncertainty associated with work, whether at the level of social structure, individual entrepreneurial activities, or employment, is a significant value if it does not take extreme forms. It is necessary to protect a certain degree of uncertainty because it is a condition for our freedom in a deterministic world. Uncertainty is our greatest enemy, but also the greatest ally we need in our lives. It often becomes a neglected value. In addition to work-related uncertainty, we can talk about other uncertainties in this context, but what is most important is

work which we devote most of our time to and in which many of us find opportunities for self-actualisation and meaning-making. In other words, we need to fill our lives with something. Even if life was not associated with freedom, there is still a sense of freedom, as Albert Camus (1942/1979) observes, and we can add that this feeling is associated with uncertainty without which the economic system and business cannot function (von Mises, 1920/1990). Perhaps uncertainty is a solution to the problem of the globalized middle class that has nowhere to go, as noted by social anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2008). Uncertainty makes it possible to create and build something again and again. And the understanding of uncertainty and the changes of approaches to uncertainty dramatically transform society and individual relationships within society. Thus, all history seems to be teaching us how to live with uncertainty, how to conceptualize it appropriately, and how to optimize its impact. A world with extreme uncertainty and a world without uncertainty are not good places to live.

Both the analysis of socio-economic relations and historical experience show that if uncertainty is removed from society and a centrally planned economy is established, the freedom to choose an occupation and the incentive to work are thereby abolished. Uncertainty is also important for business as it forces entrepreneurs to create new opportunities and seek profit. Without uncertainty, in a centrally planned economy, there is no market or economy, there is no even business activity. Entrepreneurs must be confronted with uncertainty about their existence (related to the threat to their being) and manage activities in order to achieve the optimum level of uncertainty and risk. In the context of employment, uncertainty is also important, and as sociological research shows, some people prefer the uncertainty of employment over certainty. These preferences are shaped by both social and psychological determinants. It is important to stress that uncertainty is important for personal development and for the sense of freedom.

The present affected by the COVID-19 pandemic brings considerable uncertainty that will transform various social processes. Moreover, because of the hard-to-predict mutations and the uncertainty about the success of full-scale vaccination programmes, we cannot be certain about when the struggle against the pandemic will be over. This context shapes one of the greatest lessons in our lives, which directly affects our ability to cope with uncertainty. In this shattering of the preconceived meanings we have attached to our former places in the hierarchy of the world, we have an opportunity to reassert the importance of interpersonal relationships and the value of human life—in the name of common humanity and solidarity (Patočka, 1990/1999). It is important for society to be able to assess an acceptable level of uncertainty that allows for a gradual return of people to their workplaces, because, as Adrienne Eaton and Charles Heckscher (2021) remind us, the workplace is an important place for the organization of workers and a space for mutual solidarity. As humans, we need to engage in face-to-face interactions and mutually affirm our humanity. It is only through common dialogue that we are able to deal with the greatest challenges, as evidenced by examples from the past (see: Camus, 2002/2006).

References

- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society: Towards a new modernity* (M. Ritter, Trans.). SAGE. (Originally published in German 1986)
- Camus, A. (1956). *The rebel: an essay on man in revolt* (A. Bower, Trans.). Vintage Books. (Originally published in French 1951)
- Camus, A. (1979). *The myth of Sisyphus* (J. O'Brien, Trans.). Penguin Books. (Originally published in French 1942)
- Camus, A. (2006). Neither victims nor executioners (A. Goldhammer, Trans.). In J. Lévi-Valensi (Ed.), *Camus at Combat: Writings 1944–1947* (pp. 255–276). Princeton University Press. (Originally published in French 2002)
- Eaton, A., & Heckscher, C. (2021). COVID's impacts on the field of labour and employment relations. *Journal of Management Studies*, 58(1), 275–279. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12645>
- Engels, F. (1908). *Socialism, utopian and scientific* (E. Aveling, Trans.). Charles H. Kerr & Company. (Originally published in German 1880)
- Engels, F. (1987). Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring's revolution in science (E. Burns, Trans.) In *K. Marx & F. Engels Collected works, Volume 25 Engels* (pp. 1–312). International Publishers. (Originally published in German 1878)
- Fitzpatrick, J. J. (Ed.). (2020). The value of uncertainty. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, 34(4), 191. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apnu.2020.07.025>
- Friedman, M. (2002). *Capitalism and freedom*. University of Chicago Press. (Originally published in 1962)
- Haak-Saheem, W. (2020). Talent management in Covid-19 crisis: how Dubai manages and sustains its global talent pool. *Asian Business & Management*, 19, 298–301. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41291-020-00120-4>
- Halová, D., & Müller, M. (2021). Innovative approaches to recruiting: Using social media to become the employer of choice for generation Z. In *Proceedings of the 16th European Conference on Innovation and Entrepreneurship ECIE 2021* (pp. 1135–1143). Lisbon: Academic Conferences International Limited.
- Hansson, S. O. (1999). A philosophical perspective on risk. *Ambio*, 28(6), 539–542. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4314951>
- Hastie, R., & Dawes, R. M. (2010). *Rational choice in an uncertain world: The psychology of judgment and decision making* (2nd ed.). SAGE.
- Hayek, F. (2001). *The road to serfdom* (2nd ed.). Routledge. (Originally published in 1944)
- Ho, K. (2009). *Liquidated: An ethnography of Wall Street*. Duke University Press.

Hylland Eriksen, T. (2008). *Storeulvsyndromet: Jakten på lykken i overflodssamfunnet* [Big Bad Wolf syndrome: The pursuit of happiness in abundance society]. Aschehoug.

Knight, F. H. (1921). *Risk, uncertainty, and profit*. Houghton Mifflin Company.

Kročil, O., Müller, M., Kubátová, J., & Dopita, M. (2021). *Sociální podnikání v ČR v době pandemie COVID-19 a po ní: Rozvoj a implementace krizového řízení. Souhrnná výzkumná zpráva z kvalitativního výzkumu* [Social entrepreneurship in the Czech Republic during and after the COVID-19 pandemic: Development and implementation of crisis management. Qualitative research report]. TESSEA CR, z.s. <https://www.tessea.cz/publikace/586-socialni-podnikani-v-cr-v-dobe-pandemie-covid-19-a-po-ni-rozvoj-a-implementace-krizoveho-rizeni-2>

Kročil, O., Müller, M., & Kubátová, J. (in press). Vulnerable social enterprises: Sensemaking of the COVID-19 crisis in the Czech Republic.

Lange, O. (1938). On the economic theory of socialism. In B. E. Lippincott (Ed.), *On the economic theory of socialism* (pp. 55–129). University of Minnesota Press.

Lidskog, R., & Sundqvist, G. (2012). Sociology of risk. In S. Roeser, R. Hillerbrand, P. Sandin, & M. Peterson (Eds.), *Handbook of risk theory: Epistemology, decision theory, ethics, and social implications of risk* (pp. 1001–1027). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-1433-5_40

Lupton, D. (2013). *Risk* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203070161>

Marx, K. (1993). *Capital: A critique of political economy, Vol. 3*. (D. Fernbach, Trans.) London: Penguin Classics. (Originally published in German 1894)

McCrindle, M. (2014). *The ABC of XYZ: Understanding the global generations*. McCrindle Research Pty Ltd.

Müller, M. (2016). Selected problems of economics in risk research and its consequences for management. In P. Slavičková (Ed.), *Knowledge for market use 2016: Our interconnected and divided world. Conference Proceedings. September 8–9, 2016, Olomouc, Czech Republic* (pp. 313–317). Societas Scientiarum Olomucensis II. https://kems.upol.cz/fileadmin/userdata/FF/katedry/kae/knowcon/proceedings/2016-Knowledge_for_Market_Use_Proceedings.pdf

Müller, M. (2019). What are existential disruptions in managerial practice? Overcoming disruptions as preventions of burnout. In T. Talášek, J. Stoklasa, & P. Slavičková (Eds.), *Knowledge on economics and management: Profit or purpose. Conference Proceedings. September 5–6, 2019, Olomouc, Czech Republic (KNOWCON 2019)* (pp. 181–87). Palacký University Olomouc. https://kems.upol.cz/fileadmin/userdata/FF/katedry/kae/knowcon/proceedings/KNOWCON_2019_-_Conference_proceedings.pdf

Müller, M. (2020). The importance of crisis in the process of becoming a manager: The evidence from IPA–EHP case studies. In P. Slavičková & J. Stoklasa

(Eds.), *Knowledge on economics and management. Conference Proceedings. November 12–13, 2020, Olomouc, Czech Republic (KNOWCON 2020)* (pp. 114–120). Palacký University Olomouc. https://kems.upol.cz/fileadmin/userdata/FF/katedry/kae/knowcon/proceedings/KNOWCON_2020_-_Conference_proceedings.pdf

Müller, M. (2021). Albert Camus and management: Opening the discussion on the contributions of his work. *Philosophy of Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40926-021-00166-0>

Müller, M., & Jedličková, L. (2020). Several notes on the Existential Hermeneutic Phenomenology for project management and possibilities of its extension by other existential concepts. *Project Management Journal*, 51, 452–463. <https://doi.org/10.1177/8756972820910280>

Müller, M., Jedličková, L., & Halová, D. (in press). How do managers make sense of their crisis? Disrupted relationships and rediscovering co-existence.

Müller, M., & Kubátová, J. (2021). Existential Values and Insights in Western and Eastern Management: Approaches to Managerial Self-Development. *Philosophy of Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40926-021-00184-y>

Müller, M., & Vaseková, V. (in press). Authenticity as a way out of the alienation trap from the Western and Eastern perspectives: Insights for management.

Neff, G. (2012). *Venture labor: Work and the burden of risk in innovative industries*. MIT Press. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9780262017480.001.0001>

Osnowitz, D. (2010). *Freelancing expertise: Contract professionals in the new economy*. ILR Press/Cornell University Press.

Parsons, S.D. (2020). Entrepreneurs and uncertainty: Max Weber and the sociology of economic action. *Review of Political Economy*, 32(2), 149–162. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09538259.2019.1689634>

Patočka, J. (1999). *Heretical essays in the philosophy of history: Essays, meditations, tales* (J. Dodd, Ed., & E. Kohák, Trans.). Open Court Publishing Co, U.S. (Originally published in Czech 1990)

Rolfe, B., Segal, S., & Cicmil, S. (2016). An existential hermeneutic philosophical approach to project management. *Project Management Journal*, 47(3), 48–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/875697281604700305>

Rolfe, B., Segal, S., & Cicmil, S. (2017). The wisdom of conversations: Existential hermeneutic phenomenology (EHP) for project managers. *International Journal of Project Management*, 35(5), 739–748. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2017.03.002>

Rothbard, M.N. (1991). The end of socialism and the calculation debate revisited. *The Review of Austrian Economics*, 5(2), 51–76. <https://mises.org/library/end-socialism-and-calculation-debate-revisited>

Salerno, J.T. (1990). Ludwig von Mises as social rationalist. *The Review of Austrian Economics*, 4, 26–54. <https://mises.org/library/ludwig-von-mises-social-rationalist>

Salerno, J.T. (2014). Why a socialist economy is “impossible”. In von Mises, L. *Economic calculation in the socialist commonwealth* (pp. 34–46). Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institute.

Sjöberg, L., Moen, B., & Rundmo, T. (2004). Explaining risk perception. An evaluation of the psychometric paradigm in risk perception research. *Rotunde*, 84, 1–33. <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/31421344/explaining-risk-perception-an-evaluation-of-the-psychometric>

Smith, V. (2016). Employment uncertainty and risk. In S. Edgell, H. Gottfried, & E. Granter (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of the sociology of work and employment* (pp. 367–384). SAGE.

von Mises, L. (1990). *Economic calculation in the socialist commonwealth* (S. Adler, Trans.). Ludwig von Mises Institute. (Originally published in German 1920)

von Mises, L. (1998). *Human action: A treatise on economics*. Ludwig von Mises Institute. (Originally published in 1949)

Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society* (G. Roth & C. Wittich, Eds.). University of California Press. (Originally published in German 1921)

Weber, M. (2004). *The Vocation lectures* (D. Owen & T. Strong, Eds., R. Livingstone, Trans.). Hackett. (Originally published in German 1919)

Windschitl, P.D., & Wells, G.L. (1996). Measuring psychological uncertainty: Verbal versus numeric methods. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*, 2(4), 343–364. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-898X.2.4.343>

Zinn, J.O. (2008). A comparison of sociological theorizing on risk and uncertainty. In J.O. Zinn (Ed.), *Social theories of risk and uncertainty: An introduction* (pp. 168–210). Wiley-Blackwell.